

## *In memoriam V. Gordon Childe*

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In March 2000, a visiting American archaeologist, LuAnn Wandsnider, asked a seemingly simple question in the Staff Club at the University of Sydney. LuAnn wanted to visit the grave of V. Gordon Childe who died in the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney in 1957. 'Where was he buried?'

I did not know the answer to LuAnn's question, and, interestingly, no one else in the Department knew either. I made further inquiries, other Departments, other scholars; still the answer was the same, 'we don't know'. I was intrigued; here was a man of whom many books had been written and papers published in his honour — yet his final resting-place appeared completely unknown.

After a few false leads, I requested a copy of his death certificate from New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. This document states that V. Gordon Childe died from an accidental fall at Luchetti Lookout (Govett's Leap), Blackheath, on 19 October 1957. After the funeral service, on 23 October 1957, Gordon Childe's remains were taken to the Northern Suburbs Crematorium.

Vere Gordon Childe's memorial plaque lies in a shady corner of the Crematorium Gardens (FIGURE 1), amongst a small collection of Tree Memorials, number NT 451A. The plaque is attached to a small concrete plinth within the Northern Terrace, simply inscribed with his name and the date of his death. When I was given the location details by the staff at the Gardens, I set out expecting to find the location of his memorial without any difficulty. After 15 minutes of searching, I could not locate his name. Following the numbering system I found the right memorial, glanced at the name at top, and immediately assumed that someone had made a mistake.

The first name read, 'Marion H. Shannon, died 28th October, 1940'. Assuming that this was a family memorial I did not look closely at the second name and it was a little while before the inscription 'Vere G. Childe, died 19th October, 1957', snapped into focus (FIGURES 2 & 3).

Marion Holoborough Shannon was born in 1866 and died in 1940, aged 74 years. I assume that Marion is directly related to Elizabeth Jean Shan-

non, wife of Childe's cousin, Alexander Gordon. Alexander Gordon and Childe's life-long friend, Herbert 'Doc' Evatt, organized the funeral held at St Thomas' Church in North Sydney.

Childe admitted that he never saved any money (Childe 1957). He was generous to his family, students and the discipline (Green 1981: 71, 144). In his last will, Childe left the royalties from his publications to the Institute of Archaeology in London, the provision for an annuity to be paid to his sister Ethel for her lifetime, and made other monetary gifts to his family (Green 1981: 144). It is likely that Childe died having left no provision for his funeral or instructions with friends or relatives regarding his last resting-place. For a man of his political and philosophical beliefs this is perhaps not surprising. At the time of his death, I assume that Childe's name was kindly added to an existing memorial plaque belonging to the Shannon family.

I must admit that I found it a little curious how a man of Childe's intellectual stature within the discipline could fade from view in such a way that the location of his final memorial was unknown to most. It may have been more than enough for Childe that his many published works are still the subject of discussion and debate and that this is a fitting memorial to a great prehistorian. 'In creating ideas that are thus accepted, any mortal member of Society attains immortality — yes, though his name be forgotten as completely as his bodily form dissolve. Personally I desire no more' (Childe 1956: 130).

Some of my motivation for writing this piece was to answer LuAnn's question; the remainder is to raise another question. Would *ANTIQUITY* consider raising the issue of sponsoring a new memorial to Vere Gordon Childe with its readership? As an archaeologist Childe gave a great deal to the discipline during his working life; perhaps, as an archaeological community, we could all give something back?

[We applaud this proposal and ask that readers respond to us at *ANTIQUITY*, if they feel a memorial to Childe would be an appropriate gesture. — Editor]

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FIGURE 1. General view of Northern Terrace, Northern Suburbs Crematorium. White arrow indicates Childe's memorial plinth.



#### References

- CHILDE, V.G. 1956. *Society and knowledge*. New York (NY): Harper Brothers.  
 1957. Letter quoted in G.E. Daniel, Editorial, *Antiquity* 54 (1980): 2-3.  
 GREEN, S. 1981. *Prehistorian: A biography of V. Gordon Childe*. Bradford-on-Avon: Moonraker Press.

FIGURE 2. Shannon/Childe cremation memorial.



FIGURE 3. Close-up view of FIGURE 2.